

Training ARNG FA Units for Full-Spectrum Operations



A 29th Infantry Division (Light) Artillery (Div Arty) Soldier participates in a four-day full-spectrum operations exercise during annual training. Each battalion cycled through the three evaluated training lanes each day.

The Marcalastan commander never had led his battery through an urban environment before. Intelligence estimates assured him the town was not a threat and the local MP [military police] battalion had secured the host nation's refueling point in the area. He still felt uneasy as he began to lead the battery convoy through the relatively quiet streets of Marcalan in the fictional country of Marcalastan. He reflected on how his artillery mission had changed.

Suddenly, he heard an explosion to the rear of the column, and his SINCGARS [single-channel ground and airborne radio system] chirped to life.

"Easy 06, IED [improvised explosive device] exploded near the XO's [executive officer's] vehicle, and we are being engaged to the rear of the column by small arms fire...we need to get out of here!"

The Field Artillery mission truly is changing. Army National Guard (ARNG) artillery units countrywide are training not only for traditional fire support roles but also to operate as combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) elements. In addition, they are training in infantry tasks like their active brethren, such as conducting patrols, clearing buildings, conducting vehicle checkpoints and working with the media.

This article discusses training the 29th Infantry Division (Light) Artillery (Div Arty) conducted in June 2005 to meet the demands of the contemporary operational environment (COE). It provides a framework for other ARNG FA commanders and staffs to develop training for the full-spectrum environment while simultaneously preparing FA units to execute their mission-essential task lists (METLs).

Commander's Vision. The division commander established training guidance focused on developing enhanced sections to deploy rapidly. He directed that all subordinate elements develop multifunctional squads and sections.

Multifunctional squad training is based on the division's Warrior Task List, a set of individual and collective tasks aimed at preparing a multi-skilled, highly adaptive force. (See Figure 1.) Division units that mobilize must have the skills to adapt to the COE.

Road to War. The Div Arty staff developed a Warrior Task evaluation lane training exercise for the 2005 annual training (AT) cycle. The exercise was to include many of the problems deployed units are facing in Southwest Asia. Initial planning began during AT

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in June 2004.

The S2 developed a scenario based on events and operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Div Arty staff planned the scenario while allowing subordinate batteries to continue training on standard METL tasks throughout the balance of that year and AT.

The scenario had the batteries taking part in coalition stability and support operations (SASO) in the fictional country of Marcalastan (Virginia ARNG Maneuver Training Center at Fort Pickett). Marcalastan was a fledgling transitional Islamic state in the Persian Gulf region. The country was emerging from a long civil war that saw the rise of a dictator who bankrupted the country and turned on his neighbors.

A US-led coalition sanctioned by the UN was sent to intervene and restore democracy and ensure stability in the oil-rich region. An insurgency of Islamic fundamentalists surfaced, bent on destabilizing the new government and installing a Mullah-based theocracy.

The Div Arty units' mission was to deploy in support of the Marcalastan De-

fense Force (MDF) in SASO operations and provide the independent peoples of Marcalastan the ability to hold free and fair elections.

This scenario forced units that spent most of their time in field environments to train in urban terrain while resolving complex issues, such as civilians on the battlefield, embedded reporters, IEDs, snipers and hostage situations. The training consisted of three lanes with individual and collective tasks evaluated in each lane. (See Figure 2 on Page 36.)

The plan was for each firing battery to enter the first lane of the exercise during the AT cycle on its way to conduct firing operations. This allowed better command and control (C²) of the exercise and the availability of headquarters and headquarters battery (HHB) personnel to support the resource-intensive military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) part of the exercise.

Operation Marcalastan Freedom. The exercise was developed in three phases. This development process provided opportunities to train the Div Arty staff, observer/controllers (O/Cs) and the opposing force (OPFOR).

In Phase I, the staff developed the operations order (OPORD) in the fall of 2004 and briefed it to the division commander,

battalion commanders and their key staff members in January 2005. Attendees were limited to ensure that the plan would maintain some element of surprise and maximize training effectiveness when the training was executed.

The briefing included a comprehensive intelligence update by an enthusiastic S2 dressed as an insurgent leader. Attendees received copies of the order and several intelligence summaries and graphics products, such as overlays and satellite images of the area of operations (AO) and the MOUT site. This allowed the fairly new Div Arty staff to train on and use the military decision-making process (MDMP).

Phase II focused on reconnoitering the training sites at Fort Pickett, selecting and training the OPFOR and the O/Cs, and developing an evaluation checklist and O/C certification. During February and March inactive duty training (IDT) weekend drills, the staff established the evaluation criteria the O/Cs were to use during the exercise.

The O/Cs selected training sites and visited them to validate the sites'

Urban Movement

- React to a sniper.
- Conduct tactical movement in urban terrain.
- Breach obstacle.
- Prepare for combat.
- React to ambush.

Conduct Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC)

- Treat casualties.
- Evacuate a casualty.
- Request medical evacuation.

Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) Survival

- Decontaminate self and individual equipment.
- Protect self from a chemical/biological agent with mask.
- React to a chemical/biological hazard.
- Protect self from NBC injury with mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear.

Traffic Control Operations

- Operate a checkpoint.
- Conduct patrols and squad movements.
- Conduct a tactical movement.
- Navigate point to point dismounted.

Convoy Operations

- Defend convoy elements.
- Plan convoy security operations.
- Navigate point to point mounted.

Figure 1: 29th Infantry Division Warrior Task List. This list is the basis for training multifunctional squads.

feasibility for the training. These included not only the MOUT site, but also a tactical assembly area (TAA) for combat preparation and a main supply route (MSR) where units could conduct convoy operations and react to an ambush while mounted.

During this phase, the Div Arty tactical operations center (TOC) selected and occupied an urban TOC site. This was the first time this group had undertaken this task.

Also, the O/Cs and the OPFOR received advanced training in tasks that they would have to observe. O/Cs took classes on reacting to a sniper, convoy operations, room-clearing procedures and IED identification. They then conducted their own rehearsals through each of the lane training sites.

Phase II closed with a briefing for the Div Arty commander on the progress of the OPFOR and O/C training as well as revisions to the operations concept based on lessons learned during the rehearsals.

In May, the staff executed Phase III, a dress rehearsal to certify the O/Cs and refine the MOUT site operation. Test convoys consisting of O/Cs and senior leaders rode through each lane, allowing the OPFOR and O/Cs to rehearse their assignments. The O/Cs and OPFOR used multiple-integrated laser engagement system (MILES) gear and blank ammunition.

During this phase, the TAA NCO-in-charge (NCOIC) established his TAA position and the test convoy entered the TAA. The convoy then moved to the MOUT site and rehearsed the MOUT lane. The OPFOR attacked, and the unit practiced battle drills. Then the convoy assembled and conducted a tactical march to the MSR lane. The MSR officer-in-charge (OIC) prepared the lane and executed the OPFOR's attack on the convoy.

The participants conducted an after-action review (AAR) for each training site and identified improvements. The test convoy then moved back to the MOUT site and rehearsed the lane a final time, incorporating lessons learned in the AAR. The Div Arty Commander then certified the O/Cs.

Full-Spectrum Operations. During AT05, the Div Arty task organized into three FA battalions and an attached Air Defense Artillery (ADA) battalion. These units came from Massachusetts, Maryland and Virginia.

The four-day exercise began on the

Lane I: Tactical Assembly Area (TAA)

- Occupy an assembly area.*
- Establish a TAA.
- Prepare for combat.*
- Issue an operations order (OPORD).
- Work with an embedded reporter.
- Conduct tactical movement.*

Lane II: Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT)

- Conduct tactical movement in urban terrain.*
- React to an improvised explosive device (IED).*
- React to sniper.*
- Conduct CASEVAC. (Treat casualties.)*
- Clear a building.*

Lane III: Main Supply Route (MSR) Operations

- Establish and protect an MSR.
- React to an unblocked ambush.*
- Fire from a moving vehicle.*

Figure 2: Individual and Collective Tasks Performed During Warrior Task Lane Training. Tasks with an asterisk were evaluated.

third day of AT. A battalion (less its headquarters battery) cycled through the three evaluated lanes each day—taking about six hours for each battery to complete the entire course.

Units arrived at the TAA at a prescribed time based on a movement order the Div Arty TOC issued. The TAA NCOIC and the two designated ride-along O/Cs met the unit.

In addition, an embedded reporter and cameraman played by Soldiers from the division's public affairs office (PAO) were assigned to the batteries. These Soldiers replicated 24-hour media coverage. The reporters also were integral in causing stress on the leaders and testing their abilities to maintain control of the situations.

Once the commander and his staff settled the battery into the TAA and the section chiefs began their pre-combat routine, the NCOIC briefed them on the enemy situation. He then issued an OPORD directing the battery to convoy in an administrative column to a firing point to support the upcoming elections. According to the scenario, the battery was to use the firing point as a center from which to project force against the insurgency while reassuring the population that it was safe.

To get to the firing point, the unit went to a fueling point operated by a host nation contractor in the town of Hafira al-Batina. The unit's headquarters issued the movement order that would take them to the MOUT site. The O/Cs called pause

of exercise (PAUSEX) and conducted an AAR on observations of the unit's preparations in the TAA.

For command and control purposes, the Div Arty established its TOC in the MOUT site's central building, which also was the tallest facility. During intelligence briefings, units were advised that this was a mosque and off limits as well as a no-fire area (NFA). From the mosque, the TOC managed the flow of the scenario and developed the situation to maximize the exercise's training potential.

The S2 directed the OPFOR cell from atop the mosque. The batteries were told that he was the insurgent leader, distinguished by his traditional headdress. Being in the mosque, he was protected from direct fire. From this vantage point, he directed the friendly and hostile civilian population in the town and maneuvered his OPFOR cells to engage the battery at key points, attempting to exploit the battery's weaknesses.

Civilians moved throughout the town and interacted with the Soldiers. Some were hostile, while others offered key information when approached by the troops. Roaming civilians met the battery in the streets as it entered the town and attempted to navigate the main road.

The key to operations at the MOUT site was realism. This meant that there was trash in the streets, rusted vehicle hulks on the roadside and Islamic chants and music playing over loud speakers in the MOUT village. This raised the Soldiers' awareness and stress levels.

As the convoy approached the town, an MP met the battery commander and advised him the town was safe and they should proceed to the fueling point. The trigger for the OPFOR to engage the entire column was the first vehicle's reaching the fueling point. At the head of the convoy, a simple toy rocket engine on a fishing line running across the street was followed by a series of pyrotechnic blasts to signify a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attack on one of the vehicles. The O/Cs immediately rendered the vehicle inoperable and designated casualties.

From the mosque, the insurgent leader initiated IED blasts to the center of the column while snipers from the surrounding buildings engaged Soldiers. A small roving OPFOR team attacked the rear of the column while the O/Cs evaluated the commander's ability to gain situational awareness, report to his higher headquarters and develop the situation

on the ground.

The culminating point of the lane was clearing a building occupied by a sniper and rescuing an American hostage.

PAUSEX was called when the unit had established a security perimeter and was beginning to call in reinforcements and evacuate casualties. An AAR was conducted over a sand table where battery commanders and key leaders walked through and discussed their actions at the MOUT site. The batteries then were issued a movement order to take them along an MSR to their final destination.

Units reached the last lane along a route of march through an unblocked ambush. The OPFOR used pyrotechnics, smoke, flares and M249 squad automatic weapons (SAWs) to engage the moving column. The O/Cs evaluated the battery on its ability to return fire, send a situation report (SITREP) to the battalion, treat casualties and quickly clear the kill zone. The O/Cs again conducted an AAR after the exercise.

Lessons Learned. The tasks of full-spectrum operations are inherently difficult to perform, especially for a unit whose primary task has been delivering indirect fires and has had relatively limited training opportunities. ARNG units preparing to deploy to Southwest Asia must focus on the skills necessary to increase survivability and combat effectiveness in the COE. This means there must be a balance between METL tasks and critical individual and collective tasks, such as those on the 29th Division's Warrior Task List.

We learned several lessons during this exercise that could help other units with

their training.

- *Close quarters operations, such as those conducted in urban settings, require an enhanced ability to maintain situational awareness and open communications between all elements of an organization.* Key leaders must develop the capacity to remain calm in the heat of combat, accept and process information as it is made available and learn to make lifesaving decisions quickly.

These skills can be honed only through repetition. A leader must develop the ability to react intuitively to the situation and apply the measured response. He only can develop this capacity when exposed to several training events that stress the senses and test decisiveness.

- *Batteries must rely on junior leaders.* A battery scattered throughout a city might need to conduct multiple levels of operations simultaneously. While the front of the column is conducting refueling operations, the center could be involved in a fire fight as the rear conducts building clearing operations. The battery commander must be able to establish an operations center on the fly from which he can orchestrate the response, but he also must rely on his junior leaders to develop the situation.

Successful batteries relied heavily on motivated junior officers and NCOs who demonstrated their initiatives to solve problems. Strategically placed throughout the convoy, these individuals returned fire, established a perimeter, consolidated forces and executed an immediate plan to repel hostile forces.

The key to any ambush scenario is to return fire immediately and clear the kill

zone. It is the junior NCO or lieutenant who gets his Soldiers up and moving toward hostile fire, movement that is counterintuitive to human survival instinct.

- *The most junior Soldier must understand the operation.* It is key that every Soldier in the battery understand the operation and actions on the objective and be able to conduct the mission if he is the last Soldier standing.

Often the private pulling security in the TAA is overlooked and not briefed on the operation or the area in which he is being deployed. Thus he does not fully understand what he is to face or what the rules of engagement (ROE) are.

Without this understanding, he might fire on the mosque or be inhospitable to the locals or inconsiderate of the embedded reporter. Units operating in foreign areas must be sensitive to the people's culture and traditions. A Soldier's misjudgment can have far-reaching political consequences and severely hamper the battery's mission and the world's perception of the United States' efforts.

The training event was a huge success overall and inspired battery commanders to find alternate methods to train their units on key individual and collective Warrior Tasks. Increasingly, ARNG FA units find themselves parking most (or all) of their howitzers and picking up their rifles to support humanitarian operations or non-governmental organization (NGO) missions. They must prepare now to conduct full-spectrum operations in the COE.

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29th Inf Div Arty Soldiers participate in urban operations training conducted in June 2005 to meet the demands of the contemporary operational environment (COE).